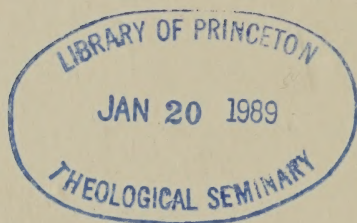


Personal Recollections of
Henry Ward Beecher

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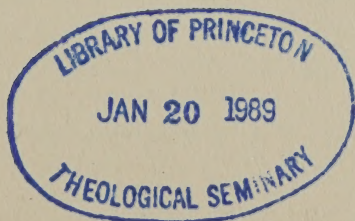
PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
OF
HENRY WARD BEECHER

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN PLYMOUTH CHURCH,
BROOKLYN,

SUNDAY EVENING, MARCH FIRST, 1903

BY

JAMES LEONARD CORNING, SR.



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OF
HENRY WARD BEECHER

Not many of my hearers can realize what strange feelings creep over a Plymouth patriarch on an occasion like the present. All, or nearly all, my associations with Plymouth Church are remote, though vivid memories.

A wide hiatus of nomadic public service, far away from the shadow of these sacred walls, divides the present from the distant past, whose chief figure in my thought, then and now, in contact of filial affection, and in this hour of loving remembrance, was and is the great and good man whose wonderful life we have gathered to commemorate. Whatever may be the experience of the younger generation who have come upon the stage of life since Plymouth's first pastor passed from earth, there is a little minority of us yet left to whose thought he is still a living presence. We know but too well that he is no longer a dweller on the earth. Yet there are moments when recollection overmasters consciousness; and we look and listen if mayhap we may see that benignant face again and hear the voice, long silent, which aforetime made these walls reverberate with brave testimony.

Alas! the illusion is but momentary. It vanishes like a mirage at the relentless touch of truth; and memory, while brimful of blessed inspiration, is after all but a sepulcher of our dreams.

The words of loving tribute which I have to

offer will be largely reminiscent; and if I say again some things which I have said before, either in speech or print, concerning my beloved pastor and friend, the fact need excite no surprise, in view of a comparatively new audience represented in this assembly. The story of such a life as we commemorate this evening is worthy of frequent repetition.

I recall, as if it were a vision of yesterday, the face and figure of the young Western missionary whom I saw more than half a century gone on the platform of the old Broadway Tabernacle as he made his debut before an Eastern audience.

I can almost hear now the resonant tones in which he pleaded for the evangelization of the vast areas of territory already subsidized to the rule of Mammon.

He seemed at that supreme moment to my boyish thought like an ambassador of Heaven ordained to celebrate the wedlock of Christianity and commerce. Alas! that the nuptial tie was so loose—a slip-knot shall we call it?—and the divorces so frequent!

The great preacher was a candidate then, though he knew it not. For there was a vigilance committee from Plymouth Church, then a featherless chick just pecking out of the shell, who had avaricious eyes on this Western gold nugget, with half formed intent to transmute it into coin! If you will allow me to carry out the simile I will say that the nugget was rough, as all nuggets are apt to be!

But a prophetic gift was vouchsafed to the vigilance committee; and they thought they saw in this unkempt and rugged crusader the essential elements of divine apostleship.

A “call” to Plymouth Church to-day is a grand affair compared with what it was in that primitive age. It is probable that Plymouth’s first pastor’s

first constituency could all have been comfortably seated in an omnibus. But the quality was good, and so far as memory serves me, the call was unanimous.

It was mutually agreed between the young Western missionary and the omnibusful of men and women calling themselves "Plymouth Church" that the twain should join hearts and hands in holy wedlock. Thereupon a meeting of clergymen and lay delegates from far and near was called to assemble in the lecture room of the old First Presbyterian Church, then located on Orange street, where this great edifice now stands, for what purpose do you think? To celebrate the nuptials, one would naturally conjecture, which nuptials had already been decided upon by the high contracting parties most intimately concerned. No misapprehension could be wider of the mark. These clerical and lay guests, it turned out, came from far and near not to celebrate the nuptials already decided upon between the parties, who alone had a right to decide, but to deliberate upon the question whether, after all, the wedding had better take place! After one such social impertinence as that, one would think that an invitation to an ecclesiastical wedding in Plymouth Church should read about in this form: "Rev. Mr. So and So, with a lay delegate, is invited to the marriage of our elected minister and ourselves." And then in a foot note a gentle reminder something like this: "Invited guests will please bear in mind that this is a wedding and not an inquest."

One of the most interesting memories of my boyhood is the so-called "council" gathered more than fifty years ago on the very spot where we are now sitting, albeit in a building long since destroyed, for the examination of the candidate for the first pastorate of Plymouth Church. Time would fail me to

give a full and detailed description of that memorable conclave and its transactions, of which I was an attentive witness.

In the domain of systematic theology it might be called a coroner's inquest; for the candidate, while not quite a bankrupt in this relation, was certainly in very straitened circumstances.

For example, when he was asked by the moderator—Rev. Dr. Hewitt of Bridgeport—what were his “views” concerning the doctrine of “Election,” he gave answer that he had been so busy trying to save souls in the West that he had had no time to go into an arithmetical calculation as to the proportion of the elect and non-elect.

Again, questioned as to his “views” concerning the doctrine of “the saints’ perseverance,” he said, with a mischievous twinkle of the eyes, that he used to believe that saints would persevere; but, having in the West seen so many Eastern saints who did not persevere, he had come to be somewhat of a skeptic as to the doctrine.

The facial rigidities of these grave ecclesiastics experienced a thaw about that time; but they soon froze up again. As before remarked, the examination thus far was a coroner's inquest.

It would certainly have seemed the height of impertinence to suppose that one so poorly equipped with theology could possibly be possessed of anything deserving the name of personal religious experience. But the council, in the exercise of sovereign mercy, gave the candidate the benefit of the residual doubt, and asked him, through its moderator, for an account of his conversion and call to the ministry. Words would fail me should I attempt to describe this pathetic chapter in the transactions of that Congregational Sanhedrim.

One doctor of divinity who was a guest in my father's house, on Willow street, with more realism than rhetorical taste, said of the grave members of the council that the young Western missionary, in the recital of his personal religious experience, "made all their tearpans slop over." I was only a college boy then; but I dared to think that I could have put the case in better phrase.

Only a word as to the outcome of those solemn deliberations. It transpired that in secret session the council, by a large majority, voted that the examination of the candidate was unsatisfactory, and the installation ought not to be proceeded with. Only through the tearful intercession of the elder brother of the candidate was it at last decided, almost under protest, that the ceremony of uniting pastor and people might take place. So much for ecclesiastical councils which have a flavor of mediæval hierarchies.

Just at this point in the course of my story of the genesis of Plymouth Church I beg you to allow a parenthesis for a word of practical comment on what may be called the politics of ecclesiastical conventionalism and the possible outcome thereof in the moral welfare of humanity through religious organizations and pastoral ministry.

Let us imagine a quite supposable thing that the voice of that council convened to decide the marital fate of Plymouth Church and its elected minister had prevailed, and the union between pastor and people had not been consummated in the only way authenticated by the ecclesiastical ethics prevailing at the time; in these circumstances can we guess what would have happened? Perhaps the omnibusful of men and women calling themselves "Plymouth Church" would have sent the council home

about their own business and had a marriage ceremony after the fashion of the Quakers, with possibly a tea party to accentuate it. Then, Plymouth Church would have had a pastor and a future, ecclesiastical politics and politicians to the contrary notwithstanding. But had the young organization been loyalists instead of rebels, and had the young candidate accepted the verdict of the Sanhedrim concerning his call to the function of a preacher, the world would have been robbed of its greatest modern apostle, and the Sanhedrim would have been the robber. It is human to err, and men have sometimes fancied themselves philanthropists when they were mischief-makers, of which possibly we have here a conspicuous example.

Let us take up again the thread of our story. The installation service, which was held on the same evening in the building which stood where Plymouth lecture room now stands, may be passed over with a brief word.

I remember the installation sermon well, preached by the candidate's elder brother, Edward, a performance kiln-dried with metaphysical philosophy and top-heavy with encyclopedic erudition. If that initiative discourse was designed to give the keynote of the future deliverances of Plymouth pulpit, it was egregiously out of tune; for no two men were wider apart in their pulpit methods than were these two brothers.

And now I recall a bit of homiletical history which took place a good many years ago, when in Judea an obscure carpenter's son emerged from His workshop and startled the conventionalisms of His time with such strange speech that it became the talk of the street, the shop and the market place that "no man ever spoke like this man." I recall

also that it was said of this rhetorical iconoclast that "without a parable He spoke not," and that "the common people heard Him gladly."

In nothing did this Master of Assemblies more mercilessly antagonize the Pharisaic code than in His methods of appeal in public speech; and the Pharisaic code in this, as in many another relation, is endowed with a longevity extending down through the ages to this twentieth century of grace.

There never was a bolder and more startling defiance of ecclesiastical tradition than that which was witnessed in Brooklyn when the first pastor of Plymouth Church gave in his own person an object lesson in the methods of pulpit appeal.

Old Thomas Fuller, more than two centuries and a half ago, in his quaint description of the fabric of effective preaching, had a prophetic eye upon this new dispensation—a renaissance of the Prophet of Nazareth shall we call it?—Likening the sermon to a piece of architecture, old Fuller says that "though reasons are the pillars of the fabric, yet similitudes are the windows which give the best lights." Most shocking was it to the conservators of ceremonial and literary tradition in the elder days to hear a preacher without Rabbinical or Greek culture illustrating his sermons with similitudes borrowed from flowery meadows and the denizens of the barnyard.

And nineteen centuries later there was a kindred constituency here in Brooklyn and across the river, in what is now known as the annex of Brooklyn, the Borough of Manhattan, who were loud and nearly unanimous in their condemnation of the self-same homiletic methods in the preaching of Plymouth's first pastor.

The concerted protestations of the conservators

of ecclesiastical conventionalism against the peculiar pulpit methods of the great Plymouth preacher, I remember well; and I confess to have had a suspicion of something abnormal in pulpit methods which were antagonized by such a mighty and respectable army of dissenters. But the multitudes who flocked to Plymouth Church from the very beginning to listen to its new minister seemed to revive in memory the ancient record, "The common people heard him gladly."

And here again the conservators of ecclesiastical tradition elected themselves to the prophetic function and predicted that as soon as the novelty of this homiletic innovation became a thing of the past the crowded audiences of Plymouth Church would melt away, a result for which they waited for forty years, and would be waiting yet, only that they are all dead!

And now that we come to think of it, who can tell but from some hilltop of the invisible Canaan the protesting Sanhedrim are waiting yet, to see the vanishing throngs and empty seats of this memorable conventicle?

Not a great while after Plymouth's first pastor entered upon his ministry in Brooklyn he added to his stated obligations of public service the function of professor of homiletics. This will be news to most of my hearers, and a word of explanation will justify this little biographical episode. At the advent of the great preacher to Brooklyn there was a small group of college students, of which I was a member, all looking forward to the ministry, and all instantly taken captive with admiration of the wonderful success of Plymouth pulpit in attracting great throngs of hearers and holding them with magic thrall. Anticipating a time not far distant

when a similar problem would confront ourselves, albeit in an humble fashion, we were naturally anxious to know how this surprising result was attained. It seems to me now a huge piece of effrontery to have asked such a question of the greatest master of pulpit oratory that the nineteenth century (shall I not say any other century?) has produced. It was somewhat like asking Shakespeare how he wrote "Hamlet," or Raphael how he painted the "Sistine Madonna." But we went in a body to the great master with our inquest, and were received with the kindest consideration. A weekly, or semi-weekly meeting, was proposed in the pastor's study for a series of familiar lectures on the art of preaching; and thus it came to pass that Plymouth's first pastor became our first professor of homiletics at least a year before we passed from college into the Theological Seminary.

A little incident of this series of lectures in the pastor's study came back to my recollection while I was writing this story of my youthful intercourse with the great preacher in these early days of Plymouth's history.

Sitting in his study one morning, waiting for our lecturer to come in, my eye was attracted by a freshly written sheet of paper lying on the table. Stretching the ethics of propriety a little, I allowed myself to glance at the paper sufficiently to ascertain its general purport, and discovered that it was a rough draft of a letter to some college, real or imaginary, which had offered the young preacher the degree of Doctor of Divinity. The letter, I recollect, respectfully declined the honor, for reasons of which but a single one has lodged itself in my memory. The great preacher confessed himself to the Collegiate Board of Trustees to be very fond

of whistling, a recreation which he considered to be too undignified for a doctor of divinity to indulge in!

The document was evidently in an unfinished state; but the one little fragment which I am able to recall convinces me that, could it be recovered, it would make a precious addition to the posthumous writings of this great man.

Truth to tell, the first pastor of Plymouth Church was somewhat of an iconoclast in the domain of ministerial ethics. The gossip of bitterness and intolerance which assailed him for the crime of rolling tenpins in the private alley of one of his church members is one of the vivid memories of my youth. And in those verdant days I must confess to have had serious doubts whether in this style of recreation my pastor was not wickedly trampling under foot a whole decalogue of ecclesiastical proprieties.

In a brief talk upon the memorabilia of Plymouth's first pastor, which I gave in the lecture room of this church two years ago, I cited an illustration pertinent to my theme from the story of art which, although familiar to some, will no doubt be new to many.

One of the most precious masterpieces of painting in the National Gallery of London represents the "Raising of Lazarus." It is credited to Sebastian del Piombo, a pupil of Michael Angelo; and it was painted by commission of a princely personage in competition with the immortal "Transfiguration" of Raphael. Its powerful lines, as well as its wide renown, are considered to be chiefly due to the genius of Michael Angelo, who touched it up after his pupil had exhausted his limited resource of talent upon it. Recalling the familiar lessons in homiletics from our great master in the study of the

old First Presbyterian Church, I am forcibly reminded of Michael Angelo and his pupil. We listeners were small-sized Piombos, whose sermons would have amounted to something if our great master could have touched them up with his pencil before we delivered them. He did his best with us, the only drawback being that Nature had been rather stingy in furnishing him with the raw material!

Imagine, if you can, a learned and dignified professor in one of our great theological seminaries, such as Union or Princeton or Andover, prescribing for a text-book to his classes Combe's "Treatise on Phrenology"! I conjecture that a professor who should do that thing would be voted by his board of trustees to have outlived his usefulness. This, however, was the very thing which this great master of the preaching art did to the little group of college students who sat at his feet as humble learners in these Socratic lectures in the study of the old First Presbyterian Church. I must explain, however, that he did this, not in the interest of craniology, but of mental classification. Interpreting the mysteries of mind by experience and observation, he found that the phrenological classification was nearer to the facts than the nebulous subtleties of psychological analysis; and there is not a shadow of a doubt that he was right, all the preconceptions of scholasticism to the contrary notwithstanding. This classification, he told us, was a germinal factor in his own pulpit methods, and contributed in large measure to his wonderful skill in holding before his audiences a mirror of life and consciousness.

I will not detain you with a detailed rehearsal of all that our great master told us in those familiar talks concerning the art of effective preaching.

They were full of most valuable suggestions which were most helpful to us in after life, and would have made us all debtors to him in larger degree if the term of instruction had only been prolonged. But the term was a brief one, whether owing to the multiplying public engagements of the master or to the feeble promise of his pupils, I will not venture to say. Enough to say that the little class in homiletics soon dispersed; and after that we were beholden for our advancement in the science of preaching to the weekly object lessons of Plymouth pulpit, which were of more practical worth to us than a university curriculum.

And now we have reached a point in our narrative at which more than a passing consideration of the elements of the great preacher's wonderful power over men is manifestly called for. Let me detain you for a few moments with a picture of my beloved pastor and friend as he appeared on this platform in my youthful days.

First of all, here was an object lesson of physical vigor as a fundamental factor of oratorical power. It is reported that a distinguished professor of phrenology once took in hand an examination of the great preacher's cranial conformation, with its diversified scenery of hills and valleys. Before, however, putting his fingers on the skull of his subject he walked leisurely around him several times, surveying him from head to foot, and then exclaimed with admiration, as if a prize quadruped of a cattle show were before him, "What a wonderful animal you are!"

I am not ignorant of the fact that eminent oratorical gifts have co-existed with frail physical organizations; but they have been like the machinery of an ocean liner in a light timbered yacht; and such

unnatural and abnormal companionship leads speedily to physical collapse.

The great preacher once told a little group of us, who inquired of him what was the secret of his power, that first of all he had a strong heart, which pumped blood up to his brain as fast and as plentifully as occasion required; and we know well enough what enormous exactions his manifold public service imposed.

One peculiarity of his physical make-up excited my admiration and envy in those early days, and that was the extraordinary nervous equilibrium which marked his public speech.

Plymouth Church was liberally equipped with zephyrs and cyclones during the administration of its first pastor; and both were promptly available as occasion demanded.

The preaching from this platform often flowed as softly as a meadow rill which scarce bends a bulrush; and then in a moment became a roaring mountain torrent, carrying the fabrics of iniquities and lies, personal and public, in its foaming path. This is a possibility only to men of great physical resource and abounding health.

Feeble men, if they are calm in their public deliverances, lapse into chronic dullness, and their sermons are sedative powders; or, if they rise to oratorical fervors, easily get into the chronic insanities of rant. The fact that Plymouth's great preacher avoided both of these extremes was due in chief degree to his wonderful physical endowments.

These fragmentary hints must suffice to give us an idea of the vast and almost exhaustless wealth of physiological equipment which distinguished the great Plymouth preacher, which, with anything like the average exactions of a public teacher in any re-

lation, would have insured a longevity climbing up into the nineties. During a period extending over many years the great preacher and reformer was an immensely overworked man; and it was a most natural outcome of his life of noble self-sacrifice to his church, his country and humanity, that the final and too premature collapse should locate itself in the brain, which aged, as regarded vital resource, long before any other portion of his physical organism.

Contemplating that noble physical wreck as the outcome of self-forgetting consecration to beneficent ends, I put the name of my beloved pastor and friend high in the roll of the most illustrious Christian martyrdom.

And now let us consider for a little space the spiritual and intellectual endowments of Plymouth's first pastor.

If I should speak of "emotional truths" to a philosopher or scientist, the phrase would be considered as impertinent if not positively ridiculous. But this was a phrase which was often on the lips of the great preacher, whose rich contribution to human weal we are commemorating this evening. Perhaps the phrase is as good as any to individualize a realm of conviction in which all the faculties of the moral and affectional nature are the essential factors, a realm which we briefly denominate the "religious sentiment."

It is fashionable with a certain class of thinkers, as you are aware, to entirely distrust the affirmations of this department of mentality; and I suppose that nearly every man in his emergence from traditional faith passes through this period of distrust, if he does not permanently abide in it. Without entering into any argumentation from a scientific or philosophic point of view to substantiate the au-

thority of the moral and affectional nature in the domain of credible truth, I would like you to think for a moment what the postulates of the moral and affectional nature have wrought in the history of the human race. Let us group all the faculties of the soul together and call the group the "religious sentiment." To be brief, this has been the great motive force in human history. It has created and moulded civilizations; it has inspired patriotism, it has been the life-blood of heroes and martyrs.

It gave Marathon to history, the "Iliad" to literature, the Parthenon and the cathedrals of the glorious Gothic age to architecture, the sculptures of Phidias, the Sistine frescoes and the breathing canvases of Raphael to art. It composed the psalmody and the chorals of the Christian centuries and has been the grandest and mightiest ethical impulse in the annals of personal and public virtue. These poor fragmentary words must suffice for the moment to give at least a hint of a conjecture that we have in the religious sentiment something which stands for objective truth, however far such truth may be removed from the possibility of demonstration and formularization.

The being and fatherhood of God and the soul's personal continuance after the dissolution of its material tenement are postulates neither of philosophy nor science. They refuse the confinements of syllogistic demonstration; and yet they have been the greatest moving forces in human history. A man may be a philosopher or a scientist without them, but never a preacher.

"The fool hath said in his heart There is no God," saith the Scripture. But there is another fool of about the same size; and that is the man who undertakes to imprison the Supreme Being inside of a definition, or a book of definitions.

The first pastor of Plymouth Church had no kinship with either one of these fools. The testimonies of conscience, hope, adoration and affection he put into the loom of his wonderful imagination and wove them into the fabrics of great epic and lyric prose-poems, whose stanzas we listened to from Sunday to Sunday in these seats, and which were mightily helpful to sin- and sorrow-smitten souls. But we do not look for geometrical demonstrations in the "Paradise Lost" of Milton, nor for philosophical syllogisms in the "In Memoriam" of Tennyson. In the thought of the great Plymouth preacher the postulates of the moral and affectional nature were not only objectively true, but they were verities of supreme import in comparison with which the deductions of science and philosophy are insignificant. To attempt to formularize these grand faiths with exact verbal statement and definition were like essaying to confine the vast spaces of landscape and firmament with wooden frames. When he spoke to us from this desk, his great heart sang forth the stanzas of jubilant psalmody whose measures were as unfettered as the song of birds. It was this abounding fullness of faith and spontaneity of utterance, united with an extraordinarily fertile imagination and affluence of verbal resource, which made him one of the foremost preachers of the age, aye, as I fully believe, upon studious and candid comparison, the foremost example of pulpit eloquence that Christianity has produced.

But the preaching gift in this man did not represent the inner sanctuary of his moral and spiritual resource. Wonderful as he was in his addresses to men, he was, if possible, still more wonderful in his intercessions for human help, poured forth from his great, tender heart to the Infinite Father of All.

Who that ever listened to the public prayers of Plymouth's first pastor will ever forget them? In these utterances, which it seems almost sacrilege to attempt to describe, he swept the whole keyboard of human experience. He carried our joys and sorrows, our victories and our defeats, up to the Throne of Grace with jubilant thanksgiving and tearful intercessions.

If the expression may be allowed, there is a genius for public prayer, which is a most rare endowment; and this gift was the coronal one in the mental and spiritual equipment of this wonderful man.

The intellectual endowments and acquisitions of Plymouth's first pastor were a worthy counterpart of his rich moral and religious nature. Most men are hemi-spherical in their mental development. If they are generously endowed on the moral and affectional side they commonly exhibit a comparative infirmity in intellectual resource. If, on the contrary, they possess great intellectual gifts and acquisitions, and attain high altitudes in science, philosophy and erudition, they commonly disappoint expectation on the emotional and sentimental side of their natures. But here was a spherical man, whose mentality was rounded out to something at least approaching ideal completeness.

I count it a supreme advantage to his intellectual equipment that culture never alienated him from nature. In fact, he lived so close to nature that his literary acquisitions, which were many and varied, were at least partially lost sight of in popular appreciation. I know by personal acquaintance that he possessed a rich library, representing all the great departments of literature, and that he had an intimate acquaintance with the contents thereof. I have heard him (to cite a single example) rehearse

details of the story of ancient art which gave evidence of careful culture in this relation; and this was at least two score years ago, when the little that was known of art-history in this country was imported from abroad.

He had a student's acquaintance with the great masters of English style; but they never damaged by a hair's breadth the robust individuality of his own style. But though his debt to books was wide and varied, he never ceased to be a child and a reverent pupil of Nature; and from her affluent stores he gathered the largest part of his intellectual equipment. He was an obedient follower of the great Teacher of Nazareth in this regard. Beasts and birds, trees and flowers, meadows and gardens were his boon companions and told all their secrets in his listening ear. He was fully competent to teach Natural History and Horticulture, and did so in an eminent degree in the illustration of his sermons.

Fortunate was it indeed for him, and for the world, in this regard, that his childhood and youth were spent away from the distractions and conventionalisms of city life. In the plastic period of his mental development a life in cities might have spoiled the great preacher, as it has spoiled many a preacher of lesser mental stature.

A brief word in passing concerning one minor auxiliary of the great preacher's intellectual gifts. This was his delicate and overflowing instinct of humor. I have a vivid recollection of the concerted cry of horror from contemporary pulpits and pews in my youthful days at the so-called sacrilegious sallies of wit and humor which were occasionally heard in Plymouth pulpit. A symphony of alarm was sounded from the whole surrounding neighborhood against this iconoclast who ruthlessly trampled

upon the institutes of rhetorical taste and the sanctities of pulpit decorum. But the alarmists, both lay and clerical, were powerless to abolish or modify the great preacher's methods in public speech. He had a psychological theory of his own concerning the reactionary influence of humor upon pathos in the relation of moral appeal; and he used his rare gift with the spontaneity of nature, as well as with most undeniable results in popular power.

But this dangerous gift was with him the overflow of inborn genius, and was never forced or perverted to unworthy ends. He gave to the humorous instinct occasionally a free rein, when, as a subordinate auxiliary factor, it could be made the servant of conscience and earnest moral persuasion. But he never tried to be funny, as I fear some of his small sized imitators have done in the disheartening endeavor to supplement the infirmities of pulpit commonplace.

During the later years of my career as a pastor, especially during the six years of my ministry in Poughkeepsie, my intercourse with the great Plymouth preacher was of a character such as is alone possible under the inspiration of filial affection. At my entrance upon the pastorate over the Congregational Church in Poughkeepsie, two score years ago, he preached my installation sermon, whose closing passages, in which he addressed me as "the son of my revered friend, son of my heart," are among the most precious and sacred memories of my life.

The installation service was preceded by the traditional examination of the soundness of the candidate's orthodoxy by an ecclesiastical council of neighboring pastors and lay delegates.

Of course, my old Plymouth pastor, the elected preacher of the occasion, was a member of that

council of inquest; but he never came near it, but spent the hours of its session in making notes for the sermon of the evening, which filled several sheets of foolscap and which he kindly gave to me at the close of the service. This precious manuscript I presented several years ago to the public library of the City of Buffalo, in whose conservatory of illustrious autographs it is sacredly kept in a binding of morocco as a relic of inestimable worth.

I have never been able to find a perfectly satisfactory explanation of my old pastor's non-attendance at the preliminary council for the examination of the candidate's theology upon this occasion. Possibly the preparation of his sermon offered a sufficient excuse. But I half suspect that the recollection of his own examination on a similar occasion, whose story I have related, might have made him reluctant to participate in another coroner's inquest! During the concluding period of my ministerial career, before my prolonged exile in Europe began, I occasionally occupied Plymouth pulpit on the pastor's invitation either on exchange or temporary supply. Recalling these incidents, I am forcibly reminded of Dr. Holmes's reply on being asked who was going to fill Rufus Choate's place as Commencement orator in Dartmouth College. "No one is going to fill it," said the witty autocrat, "but I am going to rattle around in it for a hour or so." On these occasions of pulpit exchange to which I have alluded one of the pulpits was a rattle-box, and the other was a casket bursting its sides with the amplitude of its contents.

Before closing up this fragmentary budget of memories which connect my life with that of the great Plymouth preacher, I must recall one incident of monumental significance. An event in our na-

tional history of moral and political import corresponding to the Declaration of Independence was the raising of the flag of the Union at Fort Sumter at the close of the Civil War. It was the announcement to the world of America's second birth, as the Declaration of Independence was of her first.

It was a serious question with our first great martyr President and his great War Secretary what man of the select apostleship which had been the mouthpiece of the national conscience in that memorable struggle, and the long years of moral conflict which preceded it, should be put forward as the fittest orator on that great occasion. The result of that deliberation has gone into one of the most luminous chapters of American history. Of all men fitted by eminent oratorical gifts, and brave consecration through long years of self-sacrifice to voice the Nation's thanksgiving at its second birth, Plymouth's great preacher was selected as entitled to first place. A government steamer was placed at his disposal to carry him with his invited guests to Charleston for the great celebration and return them to New York upon its conclusion. Having been one of a little group of friends whom the orator of the occasion invited to accompany him on this memorable pilgrimage, I can rehearse its story from personal knowledge.

It is probable that the speaker selected by the Government to voice the Nation's thanksgiving on the memorable day never had a deeper and more solemn sense of responsibility to God and his country for the words which he uttered in that address. Contrary to his usual habit in addressing public assemblies, both in the pulpit and elsewhere, he wrote out his oration and read it almost verbatim from the manuscript.

It is undeniable that the great preacher sometimes committed verbal indiscretions in his extemporaneous speech, owing to an impulsive temperament and the exigencies of rapid and unpremeditated utterance. But no such transgression could be laid to his charge on this great occasion. He had before him and around him, crowding in a compact mass the blackened and battered walls of Fort Sumter, as motley a multitude probably as ever was assembled in a single audience. All shades of political opinion, from those of the most radical abolitionist to those of the most rabid secessionist, were represented. There were sullen masters and jubilant freedmen, their black faces effulgent with the joy of this festal day. Rich and poor, learned and illiterate, contributed to swell the mighty multitude. Soldiers in their soiled and tattered uniforms and civilians in their trim holiday attire joined hands and hearts and voices in this celebration of the nation's new birth. Never was a man more honored, and deservedly honored, than was my beloved pastor and friend in being elected to voice a nation's thanksgiving on a day and before an audience like unto this. I stood close beside him as he read his oration from the manuscript, whose leaves fluttered in the sea-wind which swept over Charleston harbor and bore the dear old flag straight out against the blue sky. It was a noble testimony, of whose grand sentences, uttered with solemn deliberation and tremulous pathos, I will only recall the key-note which dominated the whole as one royal tone dominates a mighty symphony. That key-note was *magnanimity*; and it was not only the key-note of the Fort Sumter oration, but of all the political utterances of the great preacher after the conclusion of the War of Emancipation.

This mailed knight, who smote the slave power with wrath which knew no mercy, knew how to be generous to a vanquished foe. We know but too well how tongues of slander, like vipers' fangs, were thrust forth at him by reason of this attitude, and how magnanimity was called by the odious names of political trimming and moral cowardice. But whatever were the misinterpretations of the heated passions of those fiery days, no sane man now believes that Plymouth's first pastor was, or could be, a coward. He was of such noble stuff as the confessors and martyrs of the ages were made of; and not a microscopic particle of a coward's or a political schemer's mental organism was ever detected in his public career. Who can recall the courage and self-abnegation with which he defied the mobs of America and England in defense of his dismembered country and the rights of man, and doubt for a moment that this governmental distinction at Fort Sumter, which crowned his life, was the just reward of unwearied consecration, through long years of toil and patient waiting, to the behests of patriotism and humanity?

This crowning incident in the public life of my beloved pastor and friend must conclude this fragmentary recital.

One of the most precious works of art on Manhattan Island is a painting in a private mansion representing the entrance of Luther into Worms. The great reformer is pictured standing with uplifted and defiant face in a common market wagon, escorted by a throng of unkempt peasants. He has evidently just uttered the battle-cry which has resounded through the centuries, "If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops I would go!" The scene is true to history;

for a market wagon was Luther's triumphal chariot, and rugged peasants were his escort and body-guard on that terrible judgment day of ancient hierarchies. In that great historical painting I see a symbol of the brave knight of liberty whom we commemorate this evening. He sought not the patronage of the great in his noble testimony. In him the history of the olden time and the prophet of Judea repeated itself, and "the common people heard him gladly."

Well may this church, which he made honored and famous, recall the name of its first pastor in annual public commemoration. Well may the lovers of heroism and liberty in this nation and over the sea unite in building a memorial to their illustrious representative. These loving tributes are but the echo of a mighty popular constituency covering this great continent from ocean to ocean and traversing the Atlantic to the peoples of the Eastern world.

The name of Plymouth's first pastor is a light which will not know eclipse; for it will be reverently cared for by his contemporaries and by posterity.

May 10th, 1871-23.
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